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I Am A Navy Chief

BY PROSS – OCTOBER 29, 2013

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The chief anchors are a symbol of their culture, history and is often life changing. Since 1893, chiefs have carried the responsibility and tradition of leading Sailors and ensuring they are ready to carry out the Navy's mission when their nation calls.

Story and photos by Joshua L. Wick | U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

To an outsider it's just a rank, however the Navy chief, has existed for more than 120 years. Chiefs freely accept the responsibility to bear the traditions and long-standing lineage beyond the call of printed assignment.

The Naval History and Heritage Command notes that the rank of chief petty officer followed from Navy General Order 409 on April 1, 1893. On June 1, 1958 the Navy extended the enlisted ranks to include senior and master chief petty officers.

But, what exactly does it mean to be a Navy chief?

For Chief Hospital Corpsman Cameron Wink, being a chief means that you have been tested, selected, and trained to be the a future leader of the Navy. You have been entrusted with the lives and careers of your Sailors.

"You are entrusted with the sons and daughters of our nation, and your job is to turn them into effective Sailors and contributing citizens of the United States," said Wink leading chief petty officer (LCPO), Naval Hospital Bremerton's Branch Health Clinic Bangor, Wash. "I wanted to become a chief because I wanted the responsibility that a chief has to take care of their Sailors."



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For Chief Yeoman Renee Bass, it’s the epitome of taking care of others.

“I am by nature a very nurturing individual,” said Bass, Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP) counselor, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth (NMCP), Va. “I want to help others, and I want them to succeed. What better way to do that on a larger scale than becoming a chief?”



More than 100 chief selects, chiefs, senior chiefs and master chiefs assigned to commands in Maryland, Washington D.C. and Virginia joined U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery’s Force Master Chief Sherman Boss, director of the Hospital Corps for a run through Washington D.C., as part of phase II of CPO 365.

To Chief Hospital Corpsman Brahlin Jones, LCPO, Branch Health clinic Yorktown, Va., part of the allure of a chief and the Chief Mess is its revered position and importance to the Navy history. To many current and former chiefs, they are the guardians of naval history and traditions.

“When becoming a chief, you must be able to show our history and heritage to your junior Sailors,” said Jones. “If you don’t know where you been ... you will never make it to where you are going.”

For Force Master Chief Sherman Boss, director, Hospital Corps, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery it’s becoming a part of a heritage where your role is more than your daily duties. There is camaraderie within the ranks of the chief petty officer, a long-standing and exclusive fellowship.

“‘Ask the chief’ is a household phrase, both in and out of

the Navy,” said Boss.

When Boss put on his anchors to become a chief, a senior chief and a master chief, it wasn’t just his uniform that changed; his way of life changed. More was expected; more will be demanded. It wasn’t because he was a Sailor promoted one pay grade to E-7, but because he was promoted to a chief.

It’s this drive among Navy chiefs that make them want to have a positive impact on each other and on their Sailors, added Boss.

During Wink’s 16 years of service, he can pinpoint several instances where a chief has impacted his life for the better.

“I was sent to Captains Mast as a young E-3 [hospitalman],” said Wink. “I deserved whatever punishment they chose, but my command master chief came to me and tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Be honest today, but know that we do not eat our young here – we are Sailors and we take care of each other.’ Those words will never leave me – ever. Each day that a Sailor comes to me, I remember those words.”

Bass stressed that a Navy chief is not just a rank. It represents dependability, support, and knowledge. A Sailor knows that if they go to any chief, results are possible.

“My Sailors know, I will go to bat for them,” she said.

Bass and Wink both saw the Navy as an opportunity to advance and learn skills all while servicing their country and explore the world. For these two Sailors at the start of their careers, that was honorable enough. But their mindsets shifted, with experiences, opportunities, and having seasoned chiefs mentor and motivate them just completing an enlistment soon turned into something more for these two. It’s become about a lineage of family service and events that molded and shaped the leaders they are today.

“As a chief you learn how life is no longer about individual success, but now about how taking care of Sailors impacts the Navy ... and you are always reminded that you have countless mentors to assist you,” said Bass.

Wink added that to a Sailor – you are the CHIEF – you can build a bridge, you can lift the ship, and you can accomplish anything. To another chief – A chief is a brother or sister, a friend who will give you the shirt off their back and go through the very gates of hell to assist you. They are a sounding board, a source of advice and a pool of knowledge that you have 24/7 access to.

Since 1893 and the creation of the rank of chief petty officer, the lasting traditions, mentoring and skills are still being passed on to the Sailors on the deck plates. According to Boss, this is why so much effort goes into the chief selection process, because those selectees are creating their own legacy as well as carrying on a legacy that was started long before them.

The question may be raised by many but the answer is basic, Navy chiefs aren’t merely a pay grade or a rank but a unique fellowship bound by tradition that only 10 percent of the Navy’s enlisted force can understand.

Every day chiefs live and uphold the values of honor, courage and commitment.

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Once a Chief, Always a Chief. Happy Veterans Day to my Brothers and Sisters of the Armed Forces. Navy Chief ~ Navy Pride, HooYah, HooYah, HooYah!